DECISION RECORD

Decision: It is my decision to authorize the issuance of a term grazing permit of public lands on the Gomez Ranch, Allotment #65082. Any additional mitigation measures identified in the environmental impacts sections of the attached environmental assessment have been formulated into stipulations, terms and conditions. Any comments made to this proposed treatment were considered and any necessary changes have been incorporated into the environmental assessment.

In accordance with 43 CFR 4160.2, any applicant, permittee, lessee, or other affected interests may protest this proposed decision in person or in writing to the authorized officer within 15 days after receipt of this decision. Please be specific in your points of protest. In the absence of a protest, this decision will become final without further notice.

Written appeal may be filed to the Final Decision for the purpose of a hearing before an administrative law judge under 43 CFR 4.470. A period of 30 days after receipt of the Final Decision is provided in which to file an appeal in this office. (43 CFR 4160.3 (c))

Signed by T. R. Kreager — 1/5/99
Assistant Field Manager — Date

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
for
GRAZING AUTHORIZATION

ALLOTMENT 65082

EA-NM-066-98-100

OCTOBER, 1998

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Roswell Field Office
Roswell, New Mexico

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
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I. Introduction

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The grazing regulations (43 Code of Federal Regulations 4110) allow for a ten year permit to be issued for grazing inside the grazing district boundary. The Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) (October, 1997) states a livestock grazing management goal of providing effective and efficient management of allotments to maintain, improve and monitor range conditions. A site specific analysis of the impacts of renewing a grazing permit to the applicants, Gilbert and Elsie Gomez, is needed for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and to make an informed decision.

This document will analyze the site specifics of authorizing the renewal of the permit on Allotment 65082, other future actions such as range improvement projects will be addressed in a project specific environmental assessment. There are no current plans for additional management actions on this allotment. This allotment is within the Mixed desert shrub vegetative community as identified in the Roswell RMP/EIS. Vegetative communities managed by the Roswell Field Office are identified and explained in the RMP/EIS. Appendix 11 of the Draft RMP/EIS describes the Desired Plant Community (DPC) concept and identifies the components of each community.

B. Conformance with Land Use Planning

The Roswell RMP/EIS has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the lands use plan's Record of Decision. The Roswell RMP/EIS states a livestock grazing management goal of providing effective and efficient management of allotment to maintain, improve and monitor range conditions. The proposed action is consistent with the RMP/EIS.

C. Relationships to Statues, Regulations, or Other Plans

The proposed action is consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) (43 U.S.C. 1700 et seq.); the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (TGA) (43 U.S.C. 315 et seq.), as amended; the Clean Water Act (CWA) (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.), as amended; the Endangered Species Act (ESA) (16 U.S.C. 1535 et seq.) As amended; and the Public Rangeland Improvement Act of 1978 (PRIA) (43 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.)

II. Proposed Action and Alternatives

A. Proposed Action

The proposed action is to authorize a grazing permit for the term of ten years on Allotment 65082. The permit would be offered to Gilbert and Elsie Gomez.

Number and Kind of Livestock	Animal Units (AU's)	Period	Percent Federal Range	Type Use	Animal Unit Months (AUMs)
12 Cattle	12	yearlong	43%	Active	62
3 Cattle	3	yearlong	43%	Active*	15
Allotment Total	15	yearlong	43%	Active	77

*This active use is Temporary Non-Renewable Use as outlined in a Rangeland Agreement dated January 10, 1996.

B. No Authorization Alternative

This alternative, if selected, would be to not issue a grazing permit for Allotment 65082. No grazing would be authorized on the federal land within the allotment.

III. Affected Environment

A. General Setting

Allotment 65082 is located in Chaves County, about 20 miles southeast of Roswell, New Mexico. The allotment is made up of one pasture. The allotment is watered by water pipeline system. The allotment consists of 843 acres of public land and 698 acres of private land (See attached map).

This allotment lies inside the Roswell Grazing District Boundary, established subsequent to the Taylor Grazing Act, and it is administered under Section 3 of the TGA. The permitted use on a Section 3 permit is established by the amount of forage produced on the public lands and all other controlled lands, such as private, leased and state grazing leased lands. The public animal unit months are then derived from the amount of forage from the public lands in relationship to all forage produced.

The area of Allotment 65082 consists of rolling grass covered hills, with a mixed desert shrub aspect. The average elevation is 3450 feet above sea level. Grass species make up 66 percent of the existing plant community. The average recorded precipitation for the area is 12.58 inches (recorded in Roswell, NM). Most of the annual precipitation falls during high intensity, short duration thunderstorms occurring from May to October.

The following resources or values have been evaluated and are either not present or are not affected by the proposed action or alternatives in the EA: Prime/Unique Farmlands, Cultural Resources, Native American Religious Concerns, Flood plains, Wetlands & Riparian Zones, Threatened & Endangered Species, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Hazardous Wastes, and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. The impact of the proposed action and alternative to minority or low-income populations or communities has been considered and no significant impact is anticipated.

B. Affected Resources

1. Soils

The soils present on Allotment #65082 are the Tencee gravelly sandy loam, Torriorthenta, very steep soils, Simona fine sandy loams, and Berino-Pintura complex, all which are combined in the Berino-Pintura-Pajarito association. This soil association is deep, and are level to rolling, moderately permeable to rapidly permeable fine sandy loams and loamy fine sands. Runoff is medium, hazard of water erosion is moderate and the hazard of soil blowing is slight to moderate, except on the Torriorthenta soils. There runoff is very rapid with severe hazard of water erosion. These soils are steep to very steep, calcareous, gravelly and cobbly.

More information on these soils can be found in the “Soil Survey of Chaves County, New Mexico, Southern Part”.

2. Vegetation

The vegetation on the public land within Allotment #65082 fits the Gravelly SD-3 Range Site description. Bush muhly is the most abundant grass found, while black grama, sand dropseed, and three-awn are also found. Shrubs such as javalinabush, broom snakeweed, mesquite, creosote and fourwing saltbush are also common on

this range site. Forbs which may occur in this area are croton, wooly paperflower, bladderpod, and globemallow. The forb component varies from year to year, dependent upon the amount and timing of precipitation.

3. Wildlife

The area provides habitat for small animals, birds, rodents, and a small population of mule deer. The area does contain motts of brush or tree species that could provide quality cover for the larger animals. Game species occurring within the area include mule deer, mourning dove, and scaled quail. Raptors that utilize the area on a more seasonal basis include the Swainson's, red-tailed, and ferruginous hawks, American kestrel, and great-horned owl. Numerous passerine birds utilize the grassland areas due to the variety of grasses, forbs, and shrubs. The most common include the western meadowlark, mockingbird, horned lark, killdeer, loggerhead shrike, and vesper sparrow.

The warm prairie environment supports a large number of reptile species compared to higher elevations. The more common reptiles include the short-horned lizard, lesser earless lizard, eastern fence lizard, coachwhip, bullsnake, prairie rattlesnake, and western rattlesnake.

A general description of wildlife occupying or potentially utilizing the proposed action area is located in the Affected Environment Section (p. 3-62 to 3-71) of the Draft Roswell RMP/EIS (9/1994). A list of candidate species which may potentially occur within the allotment can be found in Appendix 11 of the Roswell Approved RMP (AP11-2). There are no designated critical habitat areas within this allotment

4. Livestock Management

The allotment is grazed by cattle, utilizing a cow-calf operation. The latest grazing permit was for 12 cows and 3 cows Temporary Non-renewable. The cattle are rotated in the allotment, using an area of private land located off the allotment to allow for rest. As the public land lies on the uplands, rest periods are generally occur during the late summer to early spring when the cattle are moved to an area of all private land.

5. Visual Resources

Allotment 65082 is located in a Class III and IV Visual Resource Management (VRM) Area. The Class III rating means that contrasts to the basic elements caused by a management activity may be evident and begin to attract attention in the landscape. The changes, however should remain subordinate to the existing landscape. The Class IV rating means that contrasts may attract attention and be a dominant feature in the landscape in terms of scale. However, changes should repeat the basic elements of the landscape.

6. Water Quality

No permanent live water exists in the area but runoff does collect in depressions during precipitation events. Dirt tanks are the only surface water, none of which are located on the public land. The amount of water and period of retention are dependent on the weather conditions. Ground water is pumped from one drilled well, which is located on private surface. The quality of the well water is adequate for livestock and wildlife.

7. Air Quality

Air quality is good. The area is in a Class II area for the prevention of significant deterioration of air, as defined in the federal Clean Air Act. Class II areas allow a moderate amount of air quality degradation.

8. Recreation, Caves and Karst

Dispersed recreational opportunities exist in Allotment 65082 as access to the public land is available along US Highway 31. Dispersed recreational activities include hunting, caving, fishing, sightseeing, bird watching, primitive camping, mountain biking, horseback riding and hiking. The parcel of public land within this allotment is surrounded by private lands on three sides.

Off Highway Vehicle designation for the public land within this allotment is classified as "Limited" to existing roads and trails.

Caves and Karst: A complete significant cave or karst inventory has not been completed for the public land located in this grazing allotment. Presently, no known significant caves or karst features have been identified within this allotment. If at a later date, a significant cave or karst feature is located on public land within this allotment, that cave or feature may be fenced to exclude livestock grazing and Off Highway Vehicle Use. A separate Environmental analysis would be prepared to construct this exclosure fence.

This allotment is located within a designated area of Medium Karst or Cave Potential.

IV. Environmental Impacts

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action

1. Soils

The soils will be influenced by livestock grazing directly by compaction, trailing that may break through the turf, chipping of soil surface caused by hoof action, and recycling of nutrients. Infiltration rates will be increased by chipping of soil surface over most of the area but will be decreased by compaction around watering, trailing, and bedding areas. The area of compaction would be relatively small.

Livestock remove vegetation that would have reduced the erosive forces of wind, rain and surface runoff. Proper utilization levels and grazing distribution patterns under the present operation retain sufficient vegetative cover so as to maintain the stability of the soils. The level of grazing identified in the proposed action would continue to maintain an adequate ground cover for protection and the development of the soils. The percentage of bare ground and rock found on the public land within the allotment fall within the parameters established by the RMP/EIS for this vegetative community.

2. Vegetation

Vegetation grazing by domestic livestock and wildlife is not adversely affected unless the amount of utilization is severe over an extended period of time. There is one vegetative study on this allotment, established in 1981. Analysis of the monitoring data collected indicates that there is sufficient vegetation to meet multiple resource requirements and forage for 15 Animal Units (AUs). The data shows the ecological condition for the area evaluated to be in good condition. Copies of the monitoring data and the analysis of the data are available at the Roswell Field Office.

The following table summarized monitoring data for the Gomez Allotment:

Monitoring Data Summary, Allotment Averages from 1982 to 1995							
	Grasses	Forbs	Shrubs	Trees	Litter	Bare Ground	Rocks
Percent composition of vegetative cover	50.08	9.33	40.50	0.08	N/A	N/A	N/A
Percent Ground Cover	14.45		11.66		11.04	59.69	3.17

3. Wildlife

Domestic livestock will continue to utilize vegetative resources needed by a variety of wildlife species for life history functions within this allotment. The magnitude of livestock grazing impacts on wildlife is dependent upon the species of wildlife being considered, and it's habitat needs. In general, livestock stocking rate adjustments have been made in the past to minimize the direct competition for those vegetative resources needed by a variety of wildlife species. Cover habitat for wildlife will remain the same as the existing situation. Maintenance and operation of existing waterings will continue to provide dependable water sources for wildlife, as well as livestock.

4. Livestock Management

The proposed action would allow the existing livestock management to continue. The existing management is not causing any adverse impacts to the environment. The distribution and supply of livestock water is available for wildlife. Livestock under rotation grazing will continue to maintain or increase ground cover by stimulating growth of vegetation and by scattering litter which protects the soil from wind and water erosion.

5. Visual Resources

Visual resources will be managed to meet the Visual Resource Management class. All proposed management activities will be evaluated with regard to visual resource management and those project that are compatible with the character of the natural landscape will be encouraged. No management actions should be proposed that would degrade visual quality to the extent that a change in any VRM class will result. The continued grazing of livestock would not affect the form or color of the landscape, or the primary aspect of the vegetation within the allotment.

6. Water Quality

Livestock grazing will not have an significant influence on water quality. Any surface water is located in dirt tanks on private land which have received the limited amount of runoff. The amount of sediment into the dirt tanks is directly related to the intensity and duration of the precipitation occurrence and affected only slightly by livestock grazing activities. Ground water is pumped from a well. The ground water is not affected by livestock grazing.

7. Air Quality

The proposed action will not have an effect on the air quality. The air quality will remain virtually the same as present.

8. Recreation, Caves and Karst

Grazing should have little or no impact on the dispersed recreational opportunities within this allotment, since the recreational use of these public lands are relatively low. The evidence or presence of livestock can negatively affect visitors who desire solitude, unspoiled landscape views or hike without seeing signs of livestock. However, grazing can benefit some forms or recreation, such as hunting, by creating new water sources for game animals.

No known significant caves or karst features are known to exist on the public lands located within this allotment. Grazing would not affect the karst resources.

B. Impacts of the No Livestock Grazing Alternative

1. Soils

The soil will not be subjected to compaction, chipping or standing vegetation reduction that is associated with livestock grazing. The stability and development of the soil would be about the same as with grazing. Soil compaction would be reduced on the allotment around drinking troughs and along trails.

2. Vegetation
There would be small change in the types and amounts of vegetation found within the allotment. It is expected that the number of plant species found within the allotment will remain the same. Vegetation will continue be utilized by wildlife but the removal of the standing vegetation by livestock would be absent. This would result in an increase in the amount of standing vegetation and an increase in the accumulated litter on the ground.

3. Wildlife
There would be no competition between livestock and wildlife for forage or cover.

4. Livestock Management
Under the no grazing alternative there would be no grazing on the federal land in the area of Allotment 65082. This would have an adverse economic impact to the livestock operation.

5. Visual Resources
No change in the visual resources, scale, land-form, and color will occur with the no grazing alternative.

6. Water Quality
A slight improvement in surface water quality will be achieved with the no grazing alternative. This is anticipated because the removal of standing vegetation will not be occurring to the degree allowed in the proposed action. More standing vegetation will slow runoff during precipitation events which will reduce sediments into the water. Ground water will not be changed by the no grazing alternative.

7. Air Quality
There would be no change to the air quality with the no grazing alternative.

8. Recreation, Caves and Karst.
This alternative would have no effect on recreation, caves or karst features.

V. Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts of the grazing and no grazing alternatives were considered in Chapter 4 of Rangeland Reform '94 Draft Environmental Impact Statement and in Chapter 4 of the Roswell Resource Area Proposed RMP/EIS. The no livestock grazing alternative was not selected in either document.

On the allotment specific level, there will be no cumulatively significant impacts from the proposed action or from the no grazing alternative. All of the allotments that have permits or leases with BLM will have to go through scoping and analysis under NEPA. Allotment #65082 is surrounded by allotments that will be undergoing this process. If the proposed action is selected, there would be no change in the cumulative impacts since it does not vary from the current situation.

If the no livestock grazing alternative is selected, there would be little change in the cumulative impact as long as the surrounding allotments continue to be stocked at their current level. If the permitted numbers are reduced or eliminated on the surrounding ranches as well, the economics of the surrounding communities and or minority/low income populations would be negatively impacted.

VI. Residual Impacts

The area has been grazed by livestock since the early part of the 1900's, if not longer. Recent vegetative monitoring studies have shown that grazing, at the current permitted numbers of animals, is sustainable. If the mitigation measures are enacted, then there would be no residual impacts to the proposed action.

VII. Mitigating Measures

Vegetation monitoring studies will continue to be conducted and the permitted numbers of livestock will be adjusted if necessary. If new information surfaces that livestock grazing is negatively impacting other resources, action will be taken at that time to mitigate those impacts.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/RATIONALE

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined the proposed action will not have significant impacts on the human environment and that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

Rational for Recommendations: The proposed action would not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation. The proposed action will be in compliance with the Roswell Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (October, 1997)

_____ _____

T. R. Kreager, Date
Acting Assistant Field Office Manager - Resources